DukeWrites Enrichment Suite

Word and Phrase corpus: An introductory tour
With Rene Caputo, ESL Specialist, Thompson Writing Program

Hello, this is Rene Caputo, with Duke University and the Thompson Writing Program. Today we're going to explore the Word and Phrase corpus.

A corpus is a body or collection of text that you can explore. This was created by Mark Davies and his team at Brigham Young University and is a sister site to the COCA Corpus.

We're going to take a look at the Frequency list. And on this part of the site, you explore one word at a time, the simplest form of a word. So the singular form of a noun or a verb without any ending on it.

One of the nice features here is that it will show you the word in its different forms. And we're going to choose focus as a verb in just a moment. Notice you can also limit that search before you hit the search button, but I like to choose afterwards.

So pretty quickly below we have some sample sentences. And we can move that line up to see them more easily. These are officially called concordance lines if you're interested.

And right here and on the left you can see the different sources that these come from. So if you're only interested in the genre of academic sources, you can choose here. Now, all these sentences below are academic.

So, what do we use this for? Well, you're looking for patterns. How is this word used along with other words? So we can see quickly that focus is very commonly used with the word on. You'll also notice that there's some color coding going on here.

We know that our verb is focus, so this color is verbs. Yellow here is a preposition; blue is a noun. So you'll get used to those pretty quickly, I imagine. Notice also that right now these words are sorted on the right alphabetically.

If you wanted to see the words that came before focus, you could click sort there and you'll have it on the left**.**

Another thing you could consider is what comes after focus on or focusing on or focuses on? There. So, what comes after that? It looks as if we often have nouns, yes? So focus on a noun is a very common pattern.

And if we go to the top part here, we have some definitions, if they might be helpful. And then we have what are called collocates. These are really helpful to know about. And if you just divide that word in half, it's easier to understand.

Co, together or near. And located, locates. So these are all words that work well with focus when they're near each other. So if we want to explore one of those, we just click and wait a little bit and those will pop up.

So now our collocate of energy is in a box on the left and right. And we still have focus in the middle. Notice, though, that once you click on the collocate the genre is mixed again. There's no way to click on the collocate and also retain that one genre such as academic sources, but each one is clearly labeled here for you.

So there's an academic source here. And usually the patterns will be the same either way. So looking again, what could you learn from this?

Well, we see that focus or focusing *all* is common.   And then we have her, his, my, their, so a possessive pronoun is also common between focusing and energies or energy. Focusing all her energies, focus all his energies….***on***.

And we already looked at some of the words after on. Notice that in addition to your regular nouns in blue, we also have these -ing words and adjectives plus nouns.

So this is a way that you can improve language usage by really looking in here and noticing the patterns.   Again, we have focus plus a possessive, our noun of energies, on. A lot of -ing words here as well as some nouns such as matters.

So that is just a short introduction to Word and Phrase. When you're looking to see how a particular word is used, it is often very helpful. And thank you. We'll see you some other time.